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Reagan to probe CIA leak

Plan to topple Khadafy reported

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan, demanding "appropriate action" against the leak of classified information, ordered an investigation yesterday into the unauthorized disclosure of a secret CIA plan to undermine and topple the Libyan government of Moammar Khadafy.

The White House, in an unusual step, announced the investigation of disclosures published yesterday by the Washington Post.

Since 1981, when Khadafy allegedly dispatched "hit teams" to assassinate the President or other top U.S. officials, Khadafy has been a thorn in the administration's side.

The Post reported that Reagan, with the support of Secretary of State George P. Shultz and CIA Director William J. Casey, had authorized a covert plan to thwart Libyan support for terrorism and subversion and lure Khadafy into a situation that would give his opponents in the Libyan military a chance to seize power or provide one of his U.S.-backed neighbors with justification for a military response.

The presidential directive to find the Post's sources for the article was issued as Reagan wrapped up a week-end stay at Camp David, Md. The White House declined to discuss details of the investigation, but in the past such matters have fallen within the purview of the FBI.

Insisting that the administration would have no substantive comment on the "alleged intelligence activity," White House spokesman Bill Hart said yesterday that Reagan in general was "very concerned over the unauthorized disclosure of intelligence and classified information."

"While in no way attributing any credence to the specific allegations and conclusions drawn in the Washington Post article on reports concerning Libya, the President is ordering an investigation of the disclosure of the U.S. intelligence documents cited in this news report in an effort to determine who is responsible for such disclosure and to take appropriate action."

Reagan ordered a similar FBI inquiry in September 1983 after leaks about high-level discussions of diplomatic and military strategy in Lebanon.

Quoting unidentified sources, the Post said the Khadafy operation, authorized in a formal presidential "finding" signed this fall, was primarily designed to disrupt, preempt and frustrate Khadafy's subversive and terrorist plans.

Secondly, the Post reported its sources as saying, the operation might lure Khadafy into some foreign adventure or terrorist exploit that would give his opponents in the Libyan military a chance to seize power; or, such a foreign adventure might give one of Khadafy's neighbors, such as Algeria or Egypt, a justification for responding to Khadafy militarily.

The Post quoted unidentified officials as saying that after 4½ years of ineffective economic sanctions and perhaps some minor financial support or encouragement to Libyan dissidents in exile, the Reagan administration had decided that Khadafy was such an international menace to U.S. interests that covert action should be undertaken.

The possibility that such action might involve Khadafy's assassination has reportedly led the chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Select Intelligence Committee — Sens. David Durenberger (R., Minn.) and Patrick J. Leahy (D., Vt.) — to oppose the plan.

The senators conveyed their opposition in a letter to the White House, the Post said, again quoting sources. In the letter the senators were said to have asked Reagan how the plan would avoid breaking a longstanding executive order signed by Reagan that prohibits direct or indirect U.S. involvement in assassination plots.

The White House responded, the sources said, by insisting that there was no plan to assassinate Khadafy and by asking the two senators to delete the word assassination from their letter. The senators declined to do so, sources said.

Administration sources said that there was no doubt that Reagan,

Shultz and Casey would like to see Khadafy toppled and that they believed a support operation costing several million dollars through a third country was the type of anti-terrorist operation that could safely and legally be undertaken.

According to intelligence reports, Khadafy gives support to about 30 insurgent, radical or terrorist groups worldwide.

A top-secret, 29-page "vulnerability assessment" done by the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies dated June 18, 1984, concluded that "no course of action short of stimulating Khadafy's fall will bring any significant and enduring change in Libyan policies."

That 1984 assessment, part of the analysis that reportedly led to the plan detailed in the Post, also concluded that "disaffected elements in the [Libyan] military could be spurred to assassination attempts or to cooperate with the exiles against Khadafy."

In light of Reagan's executive order banning U.S. involvement in assassination, several sources voiced surprise that the word was used in the vulnerability assessment, which was prepared under the direction of the national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia, the top analyst in the U.S. intelligence community for that region.